



YEREVAN PRESS CLUB

**MONITORING
OF THE COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE
IN ARMENIAN INFORMATION SPACE**

*(Research conducted by Yerevan Press Club
in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)*

GENERAL INFORMATION

ON THE METHODOLOGY

This monitoring was carried out within the framework of a project implemented by Yerevan Press Club in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

The study covered the period from February 22 (the day when Russian Federation recognized the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) to May 31, 2022 and was selective. To identify dynamics and trends, this period was split into two parts: 22.02.2022 - 10.04.2022 and 11.04.2022 - 31.05.2022. The objects of the monitoring were the online versions of 6 media (all text pieces of “Haykakan Zhamanak”, “Aravot”, “Hraparak” dailies, as well as Public Television, civilnet.am and 168.am, where video content was viewed - newscasts, discussion programmes and interviews). Added to that, FACEBOOK public profiles of 9 conditional public opinion shapers were monitored (the list is confidential and has been presented only to the project partner). The selection was made by the experts of Yerevan Press Club through a pilot study of publications of the leading media and the statuses of a wider range of active users of social networks. The following criteria were used in determining the objects of monitoring: interest in the respective topic, level of audience attention (the number of views and accessibility of the archive in the case of media and the reaction of other users in the case of FACEBOOK). In order to obtain the fullest possible picture in the final choice of the objects of monitoring, the political stances of the media and the selected opinion leaders were also taken into consideration: there is equal representation of the ones conditionally loyal to the RA authorities, manifesting relatively neutral position and adhering to oppositional (mostly close to the parliamentary minority) views.

The publications, programmes and statuses were studied in accordance with the following sections (aspects) of the general theme:

- Which of the parties to the war (recognition of the independence of the DPR and LPR) in Ukraine pursues legitimate goals?
- What other factors play a role in the display of sympathy by the Armenian society towards the sides of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation?
- Which side is more prone to brutality and war crimes?
- Should Armenia, as a strategic ally of the Russian Federation and a member of the CSTO, take part in military operations on the Russian side?
- Should Armenia provide political and moral support (statements, voting in international organizations, etc.) to one of the parties?
- How justified are the Western sanctions against Russia (Russian citizens) and Belarus?
- What will be the consequences of the war for the socio-economic situation in Armenia?
- What should be the attitude of Armenian authorities and Armenian society towards the citizens of Russia and Ukraine arriving in the country?
- What is the situation of Armenians in Ukraine and what position do they have in the conflict?
- Which outcome of the war better corresponds to the security interests of Armenia and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh?

- On what principles should the war end (capitulation of one of the parties, return to the status quo prior to February 24, 2022, territorial concessions by one of the parties, compromises of a political nature, etc.)?
- Should the war lead to a change in Armenia's foreign policy?
- Other issues related to the war in Ukraine.

FIRST STAGE OF MONITORING

(February 22 - April 10, 2022)

References to the topic of study were more frequent in those media where text pieces were monitored. Video pieces that required specialized resources and preparation were much rarer. This may be conditioned by the fact that the coverage of the war in Ukraine was not a priority topic for Armenian media. This assumption is also confirmed by the fact that a significant part of the studied publications were borrowed from foreign media. Moreover, none of the studied pieces was prepared directly from Ukraine. Pieces from the scene appeared mainly on aliqmedia.am and epress.am, which were not monitored.

At the same time, the media community acknowledged the importance of covering the war. This is evidenced by the [appeal of the Commission on Television and Radio](#) to broadcasters regarding the war in Ukraine (27.02.2022), which called for avoiding serving foreign information agendas.

Of the 6 media studied at the first stage of monitoring, the topic was most often covered by those three, where text pieces were studied. In the online version of “Hraparak” daily, reference to the topic was recorded in 1,157 pieces, in “Haykakan Zhamanak” - in 521 pieces, in “Aravot” - in 427. The monitoring team recorded figures close to the first three on the Public Television, where the topic of the war was touched upon in 346 pieces (news programmes, as well as interviews and discussion programmes). It can be said that this broadcaster used the greatest variety of genres when covering events in Ukraine. In 168.am, reference to the topic of monitoring was recorded in 72 pieces, and in civilnet.am - in 33, and in both cases, almost all of them were in the interview format.

Due to the activeness of “Hraparak”, out of the three categories of the media studied, which were determined based on political orientation, the topic in aggregate was most often addressed by conditionally opposition ones (“Hraparak” and 168.am). They are followed by conditionally loyal ones (“Haykakan Zhamanak” and PTA). Conditionally neutral “Aravot” and civilnet.am were the least active in covering the war in Ukraine.

Regardless of political orientation, most of the studied media tried to maintain a balance, equally presenting the positions of the conflicting sides. The exception were two media that showed the least activity in covering the topic. In 168.am, this is probably due to the fact that its main “reference group” (politicians and experts, most often and regardless of the topic, invited to interviews) supports the Russian side in the war. When inviting guests to talk about Ukraine on Civilnet.am, they most probably took into account not the guests’ political position, but the criterion of “interestingness”, the demand for guests by the audience.

When it comes to the peculiarities of individual media, “Hraparak” deserves the greatest attention. On the topic of the war in Ukraine, this media became a platform where multifaceted information and various positions on the topic were presented. Moreover, the opposing stances were held not only by persons viewed as “outsiders” for this media, through whom the topic was covered, but also by regular authors and employees of the newspaper. This allows to speak either about the absence of an established editorial policy, or about the fact that its point was precisely to present different opinions, assessments, including antagonistic ones. At the same time, this approach contains certain problems: the same aspects of the topic were described using radically different

vocabulary. And this was also manifested in case of the regular authors, particularly, the employees of the newspaper. Foreigners fighting on the side of Ukraine could be called both “volunteers” (with a positive connotation) and “mercenaries” (with a negative connotation). The humanitarian problem, for example, in Bucha could be presented by different authors both as a staged performance and as a crime of the “rashists”. Moreover, radically opposite approaches could appear on the periodical’s website with a time difference of less than one hour. On the one hand, this approach allowed “Hraparak” to provide its audience with a large amount of information, but, on the other hand, there was a risk that a consumer would not get out of the maze of conflicting opinions and assessments.

As the discussion of the results of the monitoring with journalists showed, some media, including those that were not monitored, had a different attitude towards editorial policy. In particular, in hetq.am online publication, which was not monitored either, from the first days of the war in Ukraine, general rules were developed on the use of vocabulary and terminology, the filtering of information and work with sources in order to maximize credibility and balanced coverage.

The Public Television of Armenia tried to maintain a balance in its coverage of the war, however, some elements of its chosen editorial policy give grounds to speak of a deviation from this principle during the monitoring period. PTA journalists, as a rule, used the term “special operation” in relation to the war in Ukraine, thus repeating the conceptual framework officially chosen by the Russian Federation. A number of Russian officials gave interviews to the Armenian public broadcaster, while the positions of representatives of Ukrainian state structures were transmitted indirectly, with reference to other sources. And this despite the fact that, for example, Denys Avtonomov, Charge d’Affaires of Ukraine in Armenia, was open to cooperation with local media, and many, unlike the PTA, actively benefitted from this openness. Given the fact that there are three Russian TV channels broadcasting along with Armenian ones in the public multiplex (the media of other countries are not present here), Russia undoubtedly had the advantage in influencing the part of the audience, which receives information primarily through terrestrial broadcasting.

Meanwhile, on other media platforms, as the monitoring showed, the Russian and Ukrainian information agendas, were presented almost equally. This was to a certain extent conditioned not only by the factor of Denys Avtonomov, but also the former Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Ukraine to Armenia Oleksandr Bozhko and the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Arsen Avakov, whose assessments of events received attention and trust by both traditional media and users of social networks.

SECOND STAGE OF MONITORING

(April 10 - May 31, 2022)

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the second stage of the monitoring, the war in Ukraine was covered much less actively than at the first one. This may be firstly due to the fact that the audience was getting used to the topic, and, secondly, to the focus of society's attention to the domestic political confrontation (activation of opposition protests).

The online version of "Hraparak" newspaper, as at the first stage, was the most active - 313 pieces containing reference to the topic. The second in terms of intensity of coverage was the Public Television of Armenia (246). Approximately the same activeness was shown by "Aravot" (108) and "Haykakan Zhamanak" (103). The lowest interest in the topic, as at the first stage, was shown by civilnet.am (16) and 168.am (11), which swapped places. Here, however, it should be recalled that only the video pieces of these two media became object of monitoring, which in practice were only interviews and in April-May were devoted mainly to internal political confrontation and tension in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Unlike the first stage, conditionally loyal media surpassed conditionally opposition ones in the intensity of coverage of the war in Ukraine.

The monitoring reflected radical differences in the geopolitical views of various groups of Armenian society. The pieces in the studied media contained both the Russian interpretation of the events ("Putin had no other choice") and the opposite: "Nothing could threaten Russia, it is her who "is blowing up" the existing world order." Between these two polar positions in the publications there were many nuances. In quantitative terms, with regard to approaches to such an aspect of the topic as the impact of the war on the security of Armenia and the future of Artsakh, hopes for Russia prevailed. As for the causes of the war, there was an equal condemnation of the West and Moscow. At the same time, in most cases, regardless of geopolitical preferences, Ukraine and its citizens were perceived as victims who deserve compassion.

One of the main peculiarities of the coverage of the war in Ukraine was that all the studied media considered the problems through the prism of Armenian interests. In particular, the issue of the February 22, 2022 recognition of the DPR and LPR was covered in the context of the prospect of determining the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, the issue was viewed both as a positive precedent and as a discrediting of the principle of self-determination, which runs contrary to the interests of Artsakh Armenians. The outcome of the war, as noted above, was also assessed in the context of solving the security problem of Armenia and Artsakh. Although the more frequently voiced opinion was that only the victory of Russia gives certain chances for a favorable outcome of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, there was also a point of view that the defeat of Ukraine would mean dominance of Russian-Turkish tandem in the South Caucasus and neglect of the national interests of Armenians.

The attitude of the international community towards the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine ran like a "red thread" through many publications with active presence of the topic of "double standards": the narrative of "international community shows solidarity towards Ukraine, but was indifferent when Artsakh and Armenia" were subjected to

aggression” was widely spread. At the same time some pieces pointed to the groundlessness of such grievances displayed in the Armenian society, and to the fundamental differences between the two wars.

Much attention was paid to the problem of sanctions against Russia. It was not assessments of their fairness that prevailed here, but concrete results and impact on the socio-economic situation in Armenia. Risks were taken into consideration (rise in prices, a possible shortage of certain goods, communications problems, functioning of the financial and banking system, etc.) as well as opportunities (relocation of citizens and businesses, primarily from Russia, but also from Ukraine and Belarus, prospects for Armenia to enter new markets or improve positions in old ones). At the same time, the attitude towards those that came in large numbers (relocated individuals) and their integration into the Armenian society and all spheres of the country's life was almost exclusively positive.

A separate widely covered topic was the situation of Armenians in Ukraine and the solution to their problems, including technical issues of evacuation and participation in hostilities. One of the main sources of information for the Armenian media was Davit Mkrtychyan, Vice President of the Union of Armenians of Ukraine.

Like many international issues, the war in Ukraine was covered in the context of the behavior and political priorities of Turkey and Azerbaijan. There was the following principle: “what is beneficial for these countries is an “existential” threat for Armenia.”

Within the three categories of opinion leaders, whose positions were studied on FACEBOOK, the topic was most often touched upon by persons conditionally loyal to the authorities, followed by conditionally neutral ones, conditional oppositionists being the least active. It was this setup that led to the prevalence of sympathy for Ukraine over the support for the Russian invasion. Unlike the traditional media, where the orientation in matters of domestic politics mostly did not affect the positioning in relation to the parties to the war, on social networks the users loyal to the RA authorities, and especially neutral opinion leaders, as a rule, supported Ukraine. Whereas, the supporters of the parliamentary opposition justified the actions of Russia.

Another peculiarity of behavior of opinion leaders in the Armenian segment of social networks was the personification of likes and dislikes regarding the war in Ukraine. In their statements, the attitude towards one of the sides was quite often expressed through assessments, opinions about the leaders of the countries at war - Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin, and not about the states as such.

An analysis of the monitoring results allows to formulate the main conclusions and recommendations for the work of the Armenian media on further coverage of the war in Ukraine.

Firstly, it seems appropriate to develop a well-designed editorial policy that ensures impartiality and credibility towards the coverage of the war. In particular, it should relate to the use of terms and concepts, selection of sources of information, a responsible attitude to expert comments in order to avoid biased assessments. The absence of such a policy becomes an obstacle to the adequate perception of information flows about the war by a significant part of the audience.

Secondly, the media should make an effort to cover events directly on the ground. If it is impossible to send their own correspondents, this issue can be solved by searching for reliable informants who are direct witnesses of what is happening.

Thirdly, the crisis in the application of the principles of international law in contemporary international relations and conflicts should not serve as a basis for a nihilistic approach to them by Armenian media. The realistic coverage of specific events and the war context does not exclude value orientations with regard to the role of the parties involved.

Fourthly, Armenian media to the extent possible should reject false narratives that deny the subjectivity of the conflicting parties, primarily Ukraine, in relation to which the dissemination of such narratives is more common. No matter how the confrontation of the geopolitical poles is manifested in the war, each directly engaged side solves its national objectives and defends its interests. The presentation of these objectives and interests to the audience must be based on real facts, and not on far-fetched theories of global and regional conspiracies.



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